WILL WAR CHANGES SWAMP THE SOCIAL SETTLEMENT?

Growth and Adoption of Its Policies by Public Bodies Threaten Extinction of Institution That Mothered Them

By N. H. Hutchins

NOT only in New York, but in all other large cities, thoughtful men and women interested in the social settlement and aware of its importance to the tenement community are confronted by the problem of what step the settlement must next take in the furtherance of social development.

With war activities and war needs, as well as the increased cost of merely living, appreciably depleting and diverting the funds heretofore invested in such philanthropic institutions, social settlements are suffering financially and are seriously concerned for the future. Along with this problem another and graver crisis has arisen as a result of the settlement's very efficiency and thoroughness as a social laboratory, namely, the growth and adoption by public institutions of those public benefactions which have had their birth in the settlements.

Does this, therefore, render the settlement unnecessary? Has this old and faithful stepping-stone between the alien and American citizenry, this interpreter of the country's ideals and customs, run the gamut of its usefulness? In order to continue rendering service and filling a real and actual need shall the settlements of our large cities find some new activity or develop some new and better way of carrying on the old? Or shall they maintain a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, standard, and, appreciating the value of personal contact, continue on their old course? There are other solutions, but none can be considered hastily. Careful deliberation and serious thought are being given to the problem by all those who are concerned—who realize that the outcome of their deliberation will undoubtedly mean the mortality or immortality of the settlement as a factor in social development.

University Settlement Must Answer

Perhaps the most representative of the institutions faced with this question is the University Settlement of this city, the first settlement established in this country and the pioneer in so many movements which have led to civic and social development. Its history is of unusual interest in that it is an outgrowth of the policies and principles of famous Toynbee Hall in England, and its work is still developed along much the same lines as that older institution. It has so far met all problems with courageous philosophy and surmounted with flying colors the many difficulties with which it has been faced.

The two problems now confronting it—one a question of finance, the other of policy—are being weighed with the same optimistic thought that has been found in all crises, and which, in this instance, has resulted in a solution for the first and several as yet embryonic plans for the latter. Because this settlement is typical of many another, because it is attempting to meet successfully the same situation that confronts other settlements, and because in the one solution it has hit upon a revolutionizing scheme that would tend to make it a truly democratic institution, its birth and growth are worthy of consideration.

The Place It Went to Work In

Many an idealist, walking into the heart of the East Side in the scorching heat of August, 1886, would have felt his optimism oozing from his finger tips. The mingled smells of hot and seldom bathed human beings, decaying fruits, old clothes, the stifling draughts of hot air arising from the broken pavements and issuing from open doorways; the noisy confusion of crying babies, the jargon of men and women wrangling in the many tongues of Babylon, the rattle of heavy teams over the cobblestones, and the hoodlum shouts of children dashing down narrow alleys and flashing under the hoofs of nerve-tired horses would strain the illusions of a man less sure in his purpose than Dr. Stanton Coit.

Quiet-eyed and leisurely observant, he crossed the Bowery and paused here and there to chat with a bewhiskered fruit dealer or pass some pleasant remark with the genial merchant of cast-off garments, whose wife fanned herself in the doorway and whose babies paddled in the muddy water of an ice cart's drip. Less a curious stranger than a sympathetic friend, he won the shy confidence of alert-eyed children experience-trained in a distrust of lorgnette questionings and lifted skirt excursions through their byway playgrounds and cellar homes; so when he intimated that he sought lodging in the vicinity a group of self-appointed guides, bare of foot and clad in castoffs that more than half revealed the sinuous limbs beneath, pointed out the old house at 146 Forsyth Street and stood on the sidewalk, friendly-eyed, until Dr. Coit made known his errand and passed inside.

The Material He Found at Hand

When he left the University of Berlin, in 1885, and sought admittance to Toynbee Hall, England, more than the neat degree in scholastic script attested to his credentials as doctor of philosophy. Two months' residence among the workers of that institution, attended by a detailed and careful study of Toynbee Hall methods and practices, fired the young student with a wish to establish among the foreign poor of New York a similar socializing influence. That is why, in August, 1886, we see him standing at his window on Forsyth Street looking down on the pathetic mass of humanity gathered there—the children bobbing among the traffic, divinely disregarding the attendant dangers, as they scurried about shrieking the fun-provoking challenges of "shinny," "tag," "prisoners' den," counting the mechanical rhythmics of hide-and-seek, rolling marbles, or (in the case of the older and more daring) shooting craps. Little girls rolled hoops with discouraging progress in the crowds or followed the cheerful hand-organist as the children of Hamelin followed their beloved Pied Piper, dancing from one foot to another to their own delight and the crowd's amusement. Mothers nursed their babies huddled down on the steps of their houses, and pedlers swore indistinguishable curses at brother pedlers but alien neighbors.

He Began With Half a Dozen Boys

The beginning of the settlement was humble—half a dozen boys who gathered evenings in Dr. Coit's cheerful apartment on Forsyth Street and indulged in all the delights of a "real club." Accustomed to meet in the cheerless room of an old blind woman, the change to attractive quarters and the joy of a crackling open fireplace led these boys to bring others, and Dr. Coit was encouraged to rent half the basement of his house, enlarging the original club and gradually admitting new members until lack of space, as well as comfortable coördination, made it necessary to split into two or three clubs. The girls of the neighborhood were interested in getting together, until Dr. Coit's boys' and girls' clubs were meeting every evening in the week and on Saturday afternoons. Several ladies and gentlemen volunteered to help the doctor, and soon as many as fifty children or young people met of an evening. The founder of this little settlement followed closely the methods of Toynbee Hall and met with helpful coöperation and marked success. Although he regards this first year as merely preparatory, and considers the coming of Charles B. Stover, in 1887, as the actual beginning of the Neighborhood Guild, yet the majority would consider 1886 as the actual birth date of the settlement. Nor is it inaccurate to say that in founding the University Settlement Dr. Coit thereby founded the settlement movement in America.

Settlement Makes Its First Move

Charles B. Stover was the first head worker after Dr. Coit, and to his untiring efforts, his great love for and belief in the settlement, are due much of its success. His interest has never flagged and he is as much the guiding genius to-day, as well loved a friend of the boys and girls who shyly seek him at the large and well equipped house on Eldridge Street, as he was in the cramped quarters at 146 Forsyth Street. The settlement adopted for its motto: "Order is our basis, improvement our aim and friendship our principle," and it soon became evident that, if the first two were to be adhered to, it would be necessary to move. So the Neighborhood Guild packed up, and in 1893 moved to 26 Delancey Street, where Dr. Coit's genius manœuvred to make use of every square foot of the more comfortable, but still unsatisfactory, quarters available for the institution's use. James Bronson Reynolds, at that time head worker, said of the building: "It was badly ventilated, inadequately lighted, the floors shook dangerously and the roof leaked incurably. But it served its purpose and was overcrowded nightly, long before the generosity of friends enabled us to build a home of our own." In July of 1888, after he had seen his settlement well under way, had visited universities and colleges in an effort to enlist college men in his project and had succeeded in securing the coöperation of Amherst, Williams, Princeton, Yale, Harvard and Columbia and City College of this city—after he had built up the clubs and witnessed the development of lecture courses and other culture agencies, as well as civic activities—he left the settlement to assume new duties, but in 1891 he came back, at the request of the authorities, to take charge of the winter work, and remained through 1894 as head of the settlement, spending three, five and eight months at the successive visits.

It Moves Into A Home of Its Own

Early in 1889 the new building at the corner of Eldridge and Rivington streets—a building planned by the firm of Howell & Stokes and most adequately and efficiently arranged—was ready, and the Neighborhood Guild moved into a home of its own and became the University Settlement. Here it is at the present day—a social centre for the East Side—a home that has fathered such men as J. Selwyn Shapiro, professor of history at City College; Dr. Paul Klapper, professor of education at the same institution and director of the summer school there; Dr. Henry Moskowitz, Judge Emil E. Fuchs, Max Marcin, author of the recently successful play, "The House of Glass"; Meyer Bloomfield and Samuel J. Rosensohn, as well as many others. It has been the residence of such earnest young writers as Ernest Poole, Robert Hunter, Howard Brubaker, Leroy Scott, William English Walling and of men whose names are significant, as Professor Robert C. Brooks, Professor J. W. Jenks, James K. Paulding, Walter E. Kruesi, Professor Maurice Parmelee, Dr. Frank J. Warner, John R. Commons, Professor Richmond Mayo-Smith, J. G. Phelps-Stokes and Frank H. Simonds.

In speaking of the influence the settlement had had upon his growth of thought and ideals, and of his days there as a boy, Dr. Klapper maintained that the settlement had always been a social laboratory, experimenting, discovering and subsequently introducing activities which were sooner or later taken up by public institutions. Among the benefits which the settlement has introduced and in which it has been a pioneer are the following:

Of a civic character was the petition for the opening of museums on Sunday. It was the one day when the poor of the East Side had leisure, and that leisure was spent not always in an innocuous pleasure. It was felt that the natural love of these people for the beautiful and artistic would lead them to the museums and a great benefit thereby if such institutions were made accessible. The young people of the settlement brought in some 50,000 names to the petition, and eventually the museums were opened. The fact that some ten or fifteen thousand people frequent these places on a Sunday would point to the need that has been filled.

The plea for a city-owned subway started in the settlement, and the plan to erect an "L" on Delancey Street, the roadway and Fifth Avenue of the East Side, was successfully fought by Mr. Stover and his people.

With the coming of the war the settlement, which had already made phenomenal strides in influencing foreign-born residents of the East Side to become naturalized citizens, put forth a still greater effort, with most satisfactory results. Because of its intimate contact with the neighborhood life, its fundamental closeness to the thought and feeling of the people, the settlement renders a practical service in the interpretation of national needs and ideals at this time. Mr. Eisinger, director of men's and boys' work, in a report on the present war activities of the settlement says:

"Our neighbors, understanding very little about government functions and the separation and delegation of powers, find it somewhat difficult to comprehend many things in connection with which they are playing an active part. As a friendly guide and interpreter the settlement is discharging a very unique and necessary function.

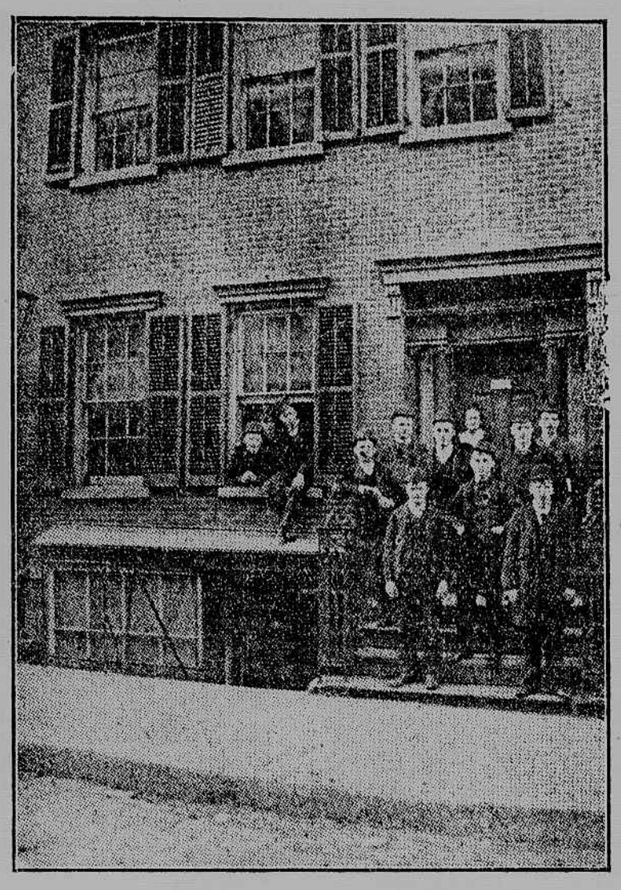
"The settlement is an outpost of American spirit and ideal. In this Exemption Board District 60 per cent of our young men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one are aliens. Among the older people the proportion is even larger. Through citizenship and other clubs and classes, through a contact in social activities, a distinctively American point of view is being imparted by the settlement.

"About 100 of our men are in uniform. Club after club has reported that every member has a bond of the third loan. As an interpreter of American thought the settlement has a great mission. The opportunities for service have just commenced.

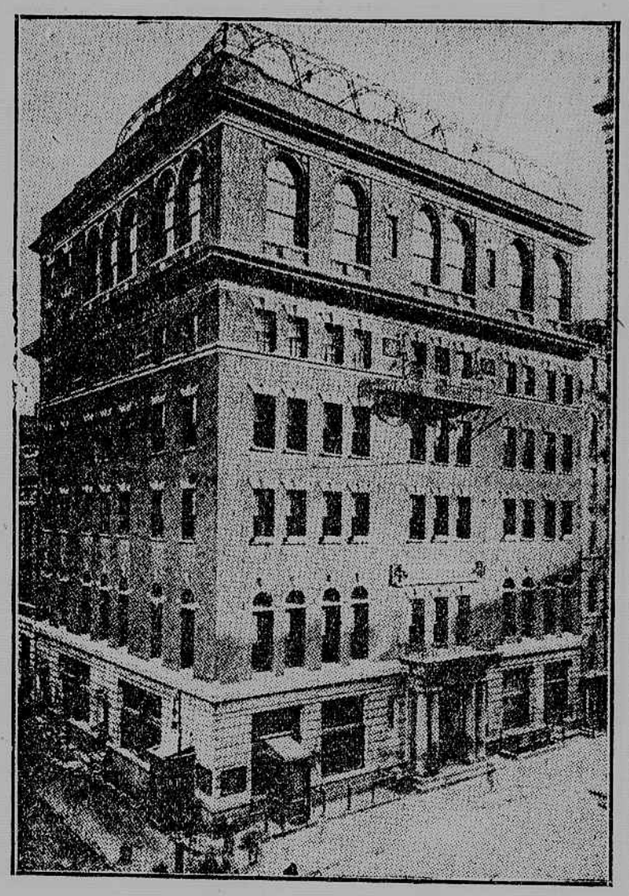
"The American Red Cross home service section is conducting a training course for our senior club members and a number of our girls have taken and completed the course. The theory of this course was that neighborhood girls who are qualified educationally should make the most understanding and sympathetic visitors. A branch office of the Red Cross has been established here, open three nights a week, at which a regular staff member of the Red Cross, aided by three girls as volunteers, is on hand, as the living representative of the Federal authority. Advice in making out requests for allotments, explanation of the war risk insurance idea, investigations at the request of the Red Cross central office and of various divisions of the Red Cross, friendly contact with wives and mothers of enlisted men are some of the functions that this office discharges. As time goes on this work should become increasingly important.

"On the second Liberty Loan the settlement sold $3,600 worth of bonds in the house. On the third Liberty Loan, up to April 30, $5,000 worth of bonds had been disposed of. In addition to this a great many of our people subscribed through the firms with which they are connected. The total in one of our older clubs reached $8,000. The settlement is, too, a War Savings Stamp agency.

HOW THE SETTLEMENT HAS GROWN—TWO OF ITS HOMES



Left—Shows Neighborhood Guild, parent of the University Settlement.



Right—Present home of University Settlement, 184 Eldridge Street

THE MEN BEHIND THE WORK

Charles B. Stover

Dr. Stanton Coit

ONE UNIVERSITY SETTLEMENT FEATURE

Working women from the surrounding tenements leave their babies here, and this improvised nursery lacks nothing in efficiency and success.

Old Stepping-Stone Between Alien and Citizenry and Interpreter of Ideals Now Questions Its Usefulness

"Under the draft law, legal advisory boards were provided for in each local board district. After the first rush of work most of these boards found that there was little to do to warrant their being kept open. Upon closing, however, it was found that a good many cases still remained to be cared for. Delayed questionnaires, changes of status of dependents, and a thousand and one individual difficulties arose, which required men to call here for assistance. The calls became so frequent that they could not be handled in connection with our regular work, and, at our suggestion, the Central Legal Advisory Board established a permanent East Side board, open three nights a week. The office fills a very important need, as these men require advice and in many cases are unable to pay for it. In any event the spirit of the selective service law is that these men should be advised by lawyers having a public rather than a private interest and it is most important that this advice be entirely free from monetary consideration and that it be genuinely helpful and sympathetic. A number of our senior club members assist as clerical helpers. The average attendance per night has been about thirty.

Food Demonstrations For Mothers

"The settlement has served the food administration, one of the staff members acting as captain of tnis Assembly District. A thorough canvass of the district was made at the time the pledge cards were being circulated and some 8,000 pledge cards were secured. Since then food price cards have been placed in the food stores in our district. All of this work has been with the coöperation and active assistance of about 200 of our senior club members.

"In addition to this we have had food demonstrations for the mothers of the neighborhood, who have responded in large numbers to the invitation to attend. During the past two months we have also sold sugar to the amount of almost a ton. This has gone to our own club members who have been unable to purchase elsewhere.

"The fuel administration, at our invitation, established an office here during the 1917 coal crisis. A deputy was placed in charge and a complaint bureau opened. The number of people using the office ranged from 200 to 500 a day, for a period of about eight weeks. Taking the complaints, making a cellar survey and otherwise actively aiding the administration, required the frequent help of our staff workers and a good many of our senior club members.

"Several of the young men of the settlement have joined the Four Minute Men and are doing educational work. All information of the Four Minute Men is sent to the settlement and is for use among the club members.

"The settlement has an information office for the United States Working Boys' Reserve; served as an information office for the Internal Revenue Tax Collector; has about ten knitting circles, one of them a full-fledged Red Cross auxiliary; conducted two successful citizenship classes for women voters; two courses in first aid to the injured, and one course in home nursing."

These are the war activities of the settlement and speak for themselves as well as the adequacy with which the institution is filling an immediate and urgent need.

Listed above are some of the civic movements which the settlement has fostered or promoted, and now a word for those social activities in which the institution has been a pioneer and which are gradually being absorbed by public organizations—a fact which has engendered one of the two problems which this and all settlements are facing.

The Day Nursery And Kindergarten

Because mothers are forced to meet economic conditions and go out to work during the day there arose the question of what should be done with small children during that time. For the very little ones a day nursery was established; for the older tots a kindergarten sprang into being—the first of its kind in the city—and here the children were instructed in the very first rudiments of education.

The free library movement had its initial tryout in the settlement, but was later taken over into the Carnegie Library established just back of the University Settlement. To take care of the children's recreation hours and see that young minds and bodies were reared in a healthy atmosphere the settlement started its clubs, introduced folksongs and dances, established its large and well equipped gymnasium and its roof playground. Until the latter was finished the settlement secured the closing of the street in front of its building from three until six every afternoon, and here the children could play without fear of harm from passing vehicles. The principles of safety first precautions and simple rules for health were taught the young people, as well as the mothers and fathers, and to meet the general lack of adequate bathtubs in the homes the settlement opened its baths and showers. In the busy season over 1,000 baths a day are given.

Forming Drama And Art Groups

Under Elmer L. Reizenstein, author of "On Trial," a drama group was started, which has produced several excellent plays, the members not only producing and taking part in these plays themselves, but writing them as well. An art class was opened, pageants were given and a People's Choral Club fostered. In every way the settlement endeavored to cultivate the natural love of theee people for the beautiful.

Summer camps were opened—one for the boys, Camp Tioronda, at the foot of Mount Beacon, and Cedar Grove Camp, in Montclair, N. J., for the girls.

Of all these things was the settlement the father, and by none of them did it attempt to pauperize those benefited. A nominal charge was made, thus making no one feel that he or she was an object of charity.

Such charges, however, by no means met the costs of the institution, nor did the dues received from the members suffice. For the deficit the settlement depended upon the voluntary contributions of philanthropically disposed individuals who recognized the place which the settlement had in the community. With the war, however, these contributions ceased or became less, and the institution faced the serious problem of financial failure. The workers and directors considered several plans, and out of their discussions arose the one which they are about to adopt and which, as we stated above, will doubtless revolutionize the long existing policy heretofore followed by the social settlement and will result in a wholly democratic organization.

Putting Home on Self-Supporting Basis

The voluntary donations had never been very large, the settlement preferring to have, instead of two contributors giving each $500, two hundred giving $5. With this new need it was planned to put the settlement, if possible, on a purely self-supporting basis, and in order to keep the interest of the alumni and bind them even more closely to the institution the directors are considering having their council made up almost wholly of alumni and to get all who have passed through the settlement to become contributing alumni at a dues of, say, $5. Those who were able and so wished could give more, and this sum, together with the dues of the active members, would amply cover running expenses. Whether this plan is feasible is, of course, a question, but the settlement is optimistic regarding it and the attempt will be made.

As for the other problem, which is fundamentally a sociological one, no plan has as yet arisen, except that there is a decided feeling that the social settlement has not run the gamut of its usefulness and will continue as a communistic force. Just what its work will be is undecided. Although the public schools have adopted many of the activities which originated in the settlement they cannot have the personal influence which the smaller organization has. In the schools, for instance, one leader is in charge of several clubs, whereas in the settlement each club has its own leader. So of the library. The schools issue a mimeographed list of advised reading. The settlement has its librarian who talks with the children and has the time to give to studying their needs and tendencies.

Teacher of a Great Principle

The settlement is, moreover, unique in its opportunity of overcoming racial prejudices and as a teacher of the great principle: "Out of one blood has He made all peoples." It has unlimited opportunity for promoting sound friendships and engendering a love of the home.

"As the war goes on," Mr. Eisinger maintains, "the need will become increasingly clear for an agency such as the settlement, which can stand between the cold, impersonal majesty of the law and its neighbors. The settlement represents the legitimate friend at court. It has a unique opportunity of serving as a medium for expressing the needs of the government and its neighbors as well.

"There are very few agencies so closely in touch with ebb and flow of life as is the settlement. No other interpretative medium quite like the settlement exists. By reason of its social basis and the intimate personal association it forms, the settlement really has its finger on the pulse of life here. Its opportunity for service in the interpretation of national ideals and as a guide, philosopher and friend of its neighbors is a rare one and should be constantly expanded."

At the close of the war new problems will arise and the attention of all thoughful persons will be needed. Then, just as it has always done, the settlement will rise to meet whatever emergencies appear.